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Editorials

'The target is destroyed'

Pulitzer Prize winner Seymour Hersh has a new book due out in September. Director of Central Intelligence William Casey called the writer on the phone earlier this month to say that it could be illegal.

The book is called "The Target is Destroyed: What really happened to Flight 007 and what Americans knew about it." It tells about the downing of a Korean airliner by Soviet interceptors in 1983. All 269 people aboard were killed.

The incident has had a big impact on U.S.-Soviet relations. Hersh's book should provide fresh insight into a still-controversial chain of events.

Over the phone, CIA Director Casey told Hersh he would be breaking the law if his book contains intelligence information that has not been cleared by the government. Hersh's reaction: "Frankly, I'm baffled."

It is unconstitutional for the government to attempt to stop publication, as the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled with absolute clarity. Casey knows that prior restraint is barred, and he also knows that he has no chance to intimidate Hersh or his publisher.

What the CIA director thinks he has a chance to do, however, is to sway public opinion against writers and publishers who venture into areas he

and his fellows would prefer remain their exclusive territory.

It would appear that Casey was not even sure of what was in Hersh's book before he telephoned his warning.

Hours before Casey's call to Hersh, an operative from the National Security Agency posed as a "book buyer" in an unsuccessful attempt to peek at a pre-publication copy of the book. The thwarted plot and the quick phone call indicate that Casey's CIA and the NSA are cooperating in domestic operations in a way that should make Americans decidedly uncomfortable.

For months now, Casey has been waging a campaign to popularize his dangerous notion that the government can block publication of information and opinions—by law, by intimidation or by impugning the patriotism of members of the media. The nation will be in serious trouble if his campaign succeeds. This cannot be a government of the people if the people let government keep them in the dark.

Says Hersh, "I am proceeding very consistently with long-held traditional rights. I love my country as much as anyone else—including William Casey." And, Hersh might have added, he understands what this country is about better than does the director of central intelligence.